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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 001346

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SUBJECT: BANGKOK READIES ITSELF FOR TWO OPPOSING WEEKEND  
POLITICAL RALLIES

REF: BANGKOK 01301

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Two large political rallies are scheduled to take place in Bangkok's Sanam Luang royal plaza over the weekend. On March 3, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his Thai Rak Thai party are preparing to mobilize 200-300 thousand supporters, including many who will be brought in from outlying provinces, to listen to the Prime Minister's explanation for calling for new elections. The People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) plans to hold another anti-Thaksin rally on March 5. There are concerns that remnants of the Thaksin supporters might clash with PAD supporters at the Sunday night rally. Ambassador and other Embassy officials have conveyed concern about potential violence to leaders of both sides; although we have received encouraging assurances that both sides are committed to peaceful methods, there is potential for conflict. Party registration ended on March 3 for the April 2 elections. Thai Rak Thai was the only major party to register candidates, alongside six smaller parties. Singapore sources have told us that Singapore is contemplating pulling out of the Shin Corp deal. END SUMMARY.

#### RALLIES SCHEDULED FOR FRIDAY AND SUNDAY

12. (C) All eyes will be on Bangkok's politically charged Sanam Luang royal plaza this weekend as Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) mobilize their supporters to show up in large numbers at opposing rallies on Friday and Sunday. First up will be the Prime Minister and his Thai Rak Thai party which predict that between 200 and 300 thousand supporters will show up from all over Thailand to listen to the PM "bare his heart" and discuss his reasons for dissolving parliament and holding new elections. The Prime Minister is also expected to roundly condemn the three major opposition parties for sticking to their decision to boycott the national elections, currently scheduled to be held on April 2. TRT officials say their rally should end around 10 in the evening. Arsa Sarasin, the King's Principal Private Secretary, told the Ambassador that the Prime Minister had assured the King that his speech would be positive and calm. Crowds began arriving in the early afternoon of March 3, including hundreds of vans arriving from the up-country provinces, Thaksin's main base of support.

13. (C) The Democrat Party canceled their scheduled Saturday rally, although they planned to hold two anti-Thaksin demonstrations in the southern provinces of Pattani and Satun. The PAD plans to hold another rally in Sanam Luang on Sunday, March 5, which coincides with the "deadline" they have given the Prime Minister to resign. There is some concern that remnants of the pro-Thaksin rally could clash with participants from the Sunday rally. There are also concerns that the Sunday crowd might move on to Government House or another location if the deadline expires without a resignation. A Royal Thai Navy Admiral (and prep school classmate of Thaksin) told the DCM on March 2 that the situation will be harder to control if the protesters leave Sanam Luang. He added that the unstable political situation "can't go on forever" and that things would have to be settled well before June, when Thailand will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the King's accession to the throne. A number of foreign dignitaries are expected to visit Thailand at that time.

#### EMBASSY OFFICIALS CONVEY CONCERNS ABOUT POTENTIAL VIOLENCE

14. (C) Embassy officers have consistently urged RTG officials and protest leaders to keep demonstrations peaceful. On March 3, Ambassador Boyce reiterated this message to Foreign Minister Kantathi as well as a senior adviser to the Prime Minister. Both officials agreed and told the Ambassador that the RTG had no interest in provoking a conflict. PolCouns relayed similar concerns to a senior PAD representative, who assured her that the PAD was aware of the need to keep things peaceful and avoid confrontation.

#### PARTIES IN PLAY

15. (U) With the Democrat, Chart Thai and Matichon parties

planning to stay at home on election day, Thai Rak Thai is certain to dominate any election, possibly winning all 500 seats in Parliament -- assuming the election actually takes place. Opposition parties had until today to register their party lists to participate in the April election. They did not. Other than TRT, only six relatively insignificant or unknown parties successfully handed in their paperwork. The most well-known of these is the Prachakorn Thai Party, led by the controversial ex-governor of Bangkok, Samak Sundaravej. Prachakorn Thai plans to contest parliamentary seats in all 400 nationwide constituencies. While the vast majority of these candidates probably have little chance of winning, their participation is significant because Thai law has different rules for winning elections in which a candidate runs unopposed (Reftel A). At the registration site March 2-3, some followers of the smaller parties waved TRT banners alongside those of their own parties. At least three other small parties which had reportedly been interested in registering were not among those announced on Friday.

PRIME MINISTER THAKSIN TELLS BOYCOTTING PARTIES TO GO TO BURMA

16. (U) During an appearance at the National Stadium to officially register TRT for the April election, Prime Minister criticized the three boycotting opposition parties and said that they should take a lesson from imprisoned Burmese Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi who was clearly "dying to have an election in Burma."

SHIN CORP DEAL IN TROUBLE?

17. (C) Post has heard repeated rumors, including from the Singapore DATT (Strictly Protect) that the Singapore Government (GOS) is increasingly uncomfortable with the negative publicity associated with the deal between Shin Corp and the state-owned Temasek company and that GOS may consider canceling the deal with Shin Corp. This represents a shift in sentiment. As recently as February 8, a Singapore Poloff told us at a reception that Singapore was prepared to weather the negative publicity behind the deal.

BANGKOK STILL LIKES THAKSIN BUT DO THEY TRUST HIM?

18. (U) Bangkok is universally cited as the primary source of opposition to the ruling Thai Rak Thai party. However, a poll published by the well-regarded Assumption University recently revealed that a plurality of Bangkok voters- 44 percent- would vote for TRT in the upcoming election, versus 30 percent who would not. 57 percent said that they would vote in the upcoming election despite the opposition's call for a boycott, versus 25 percent who were unsure and 18 percent who said they would honor the boycott. When asked if the poll would be "free and fair", fully half of respondents said they were not or not quite confident that they would be.

19. (C) COMMENT. No one really expects trouble at the pro-Thaksin rally this evening-- a huge gathering that will be covered fully by the Thai media and which will be used by the embattled PM to bolster his case that the real opposition to him is confined to disgruntled pockets of the Bangkok elite. The key on Sunday will be whether the peaceful nature of the anti-Thaksin protests will continue to hold. We have been very forthright about the need to avoid violence and have received encouraging reassurances from all quarters. That being said, there is some nervousness about Sunday and beyond. END COMMENT.  
BOYCE